The National Sporting Library NEWSLETTER

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Eugene V. Connett III: Golden Era of The Derrydale Press

By Lisa Campbell

Eugene Virginius Connett III (1891-1969) poured the family fortune into publishing the world's finest sporting books. His enterprise, The Derrydale Press, was an enormous success with collectors, but he was so obsessed with his mission that he was driven to financial ruin.

Connett founded Derrydale in 1926 and produced sporting books and prints of superior quality. Printed on the best Italian rag paper, bound in the finest materials, including morocco (goat) leather for deluxe editions, the books showcased the writings of the most acclaimed sporting authors. These books today are highly valued and easily recognized on sight by knowledgeable sporting book collectors the world over.

On October 6, the National Sporting Library opens to the public a new exhibition in the Forrest E. Mars Sr. Exhibit Hall, "Eugene Connett III: Golden Era of The Derrydale Press."

Displayed in a breathtaking golden room, embellished with murals painted in the style of Derrydale artists Roland Clark, Ralph Boyer, W. Smithson Broadhead and Paul Brown, Connett's books in their celebrated bindings and numerous Derrydale sporting prints fill the space. While most of the books are part of the NSL's collection, some are from the College of Charleston (S.C). Several books and prints were loaned by James E. Lyons, current publisher of Derrydale and NSL Chairman's Council member. Friedrich Teroerde, a sporting book collector and NSL member, also loaned his Derrydale books and prints.

Illustration of Eugene Connett in *Random Casts.*

NSL Curator Walta Warren said, "The Fabriano papers, the beautifully tooled bindings, the impeccably reproduced illustrations by noted sporting artists together yield an inspired visual experience. Visitors to this exhibition will see a portion of the National Sporting Library's extensive holdings of rare books on sport."

"Walta's extraordinary attention to artistic detail brought this exhibition together," said Rebecca Tomlinson, NSL acting director. "It is a veritable feast for lovers of sporting books and prints."

Connett writes in the introduction of *The Derrydale Press: Tenth Anniversary Catalogue* (1937): "When I established The Derrydale Press I had three definite objectives in

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mind: (1) to reprint the very scarce Early American books on sport which had become so rare that some of them would never be seen outside of a few private collections; (2) to publish a series of hand-coloured prints on rag paper which would give a true and permanent picture of contemporary sport in this country, and (3) to produce a group of books on contemporary American sport which, because of their beauty, would be preserved instead of discarded in time."

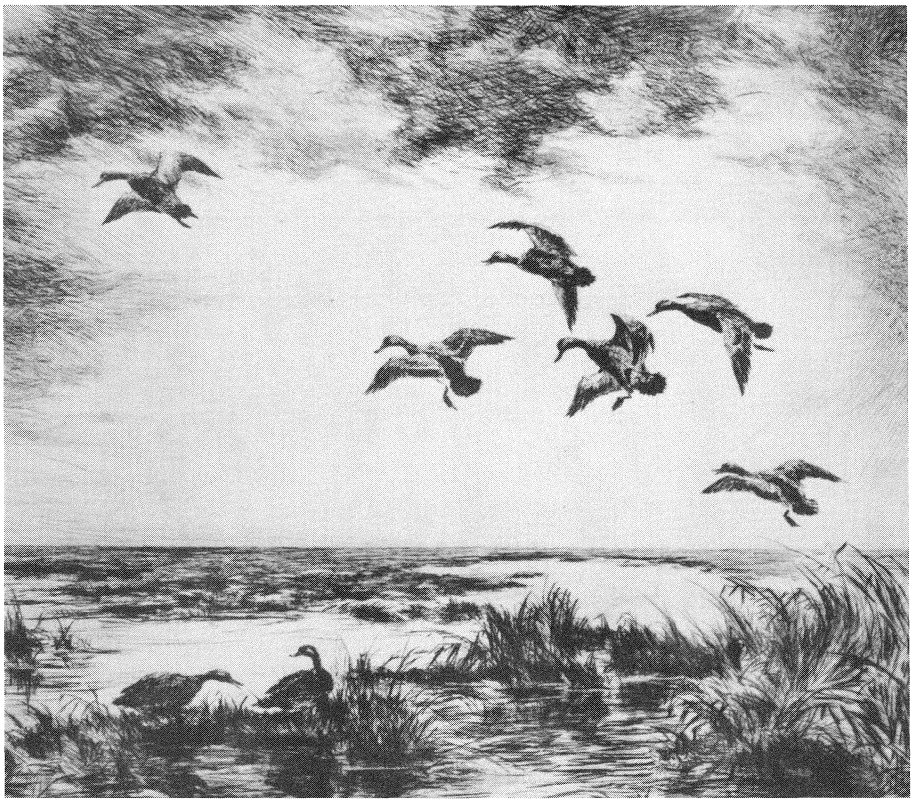
Connett struck the bull's-eye. These very highly regarded books, which cover a variety of field sports including angling, shooting, fox-hunting, horsemanship and game cookbooks, were published in limited numbers, never more than 1250 copies. Often far fewer.

Lyons, present owner of Derrydale, says, "He was an old-fashioned man's man, and a terrible husband and father. But he was a genius. What he did for sporting art and publishing is extraordinary."

Connett was first and foremost an avid fisherman. Before establishing Derrydale, he contributed a number of articles to *Forest and Stream, The American Angler* and *The Sportsman*. While working for printers J.N. Johnston & Co., the first book he designed was *American Trout Streams* (1926) by Henry A. Ingraham. Though the title page is marked "Privately Printed for The Anglers' Club of New York," it was designed and printed in the Derrydale style.

Magic Hours, the first book published under the Derrydale name in 1927, was written by Connett himself and is a collection of stories of his fishing trips. Like Ingraham's book, it is printed on rag paper with a cloth spine and gray-green cloth paper covers.

Connett was director and heir to a prosperous beaver hat manufacturing company founded by his family four generations earlier. Following family tradition, he graduated from Princeton University in 1912 and joined the family firm. It was during his college years that he met Ernest Gee, an art dealer and fellow sportsman who later encouraged Connett to sell the hat business in 1925 and pursue his dream of publishing fine sporting books.



From *Roland Clark's Etchings.*

Connett states in the catalog, "At times I have published a book which I knew in advance would never be a profitable venture; but I am confident that future generations of American sportsmen will highly appreciate the importance of such books."

Publishing these fine books rapidly depleted his fortune. However, he found a wealthy patron in the late 1930s, Navy Commander Hooker Talcott, of Washington, D.C., who bankrolled him for five more years.

In 1941, with the outbreak of World War II, Talcott went off to war and Connett was no longer able to obtain the Italian rag paper. Plus he was out of money. With a heavy heart, he sold Derrydale to a remainder dealer named Nat Wartells and went to work for the New Jersey Highway Department as an executive assistant.

After the war, he became director of the Sporting Book Division of Van Nostrand Publishing Company where he spent the rest of his career from 1947 to 1964.

Wartells was the founder of Outlet Book Company which later became Crown Books. In 1988, Wartells sold Crown Books to Random House and the Derrydale name to publisher Doug Malden of Mississippi. Then in 1999, Lyons acquired Derrydale from Malden to continue publishing the best in modern sporting literature.

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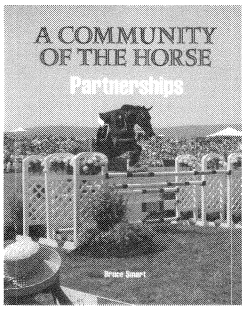
Book Review



A Community of the Horse: Partnerships, Bruce Smart. Middleburg, Va.: Lost Mountain Graphics, 2003. 480 pp. Photographs. Index. $75.00.

The first of three volumes, Bruce Smart's *A Community of the Horse: Partnerships,* presents a fresh and unprecedented view of the equestrian world. Through countless interviews with a broad variety of horsemen, Smart captures the devotion, love and culture – the community – of the horse world as found in Northern Virginia.

Smart is retired from a career in international finance including a term as U.S. Undersecretary of Commerce for International Trade. With his wife Edie, he is active in Thoroughbred breeding and racing. An insightful man, Smart uncovers layers, like a probing surgeon, for the essence of feelings and thoughts from hours spent with riders, grooms, owners, trainers, pony clubbers, parents of handicapped riders and hopeful sale consigners. The reader learns why these people are so devoted to the horse and what they receive in return. And these are no mere sentimental musings.

Outstanding photographs by Smart, Douglas Lees, Anita Baarns and others, draw the reader to turn the pages and read on.

Smart begins with a concise history of the horse from early domestication to their importation to the New World, and in particular Virginia. Subsequent chapters deal with different facets of the horse community including foxhunting, horse shows, steeplechasing, trail and endurance riding, dressage, polo, driving, handicapped riding and even a surprising chapter on steer roping. The fact that Smart transcends the prevalent inter-discipline snobbery deserves accolades. This is what makes his book so special – it is truly an objective, intellectual and warm view of the partnerships between horses and their people.

On the heels of Laura Hillenbrand's book on Seabiscuit, this book should appeal to non-equestrians as well. Hillenbrand also explored in depth the relationship between Seabiscuit and his people – the owner, trainer and jockey – which provided superlative human interest. While the price of Smart's book is a bit steep, it is well worth the hours of enlightening and enjoyable reading.

—Lisa Campbell

Duplicate Book Sale

The NSL's annual Duplicate Book Sale is now in progress. This year's highlights from 319 lots include a number of Derrydale Press books, Capt. Thomas Williamson's folio-size book of color plates *Oriental Field Sports* (1807), and Alfred M. Mayer's *Sport with Gun and Rod in American Woods and Waters* (1884).

Catalogs have been mailed to all NSL members. If you have not received yours or you wish to join the Library in order to bid, call 540-687-6542. Bidding closes on October 31.

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